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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT Friday, December 11, 1936.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "TIPS FOR HOME CANDY-MAKERS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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Listeners, along about now any day when the Christmas spirit really gets into the blood, the candy-making urge is likely to hit the household. Then somebody is sure to have the idea of making gift-bonbons and cause a family stampede to the kitchen.

But the results of many of these impetuous candy-making sessions are not always as happy as the idea. You need more than the Christmas spirit to make successful candy. You also need patience. And you need the right ingredients in the right amounts cooked in the right way. Candy-making happens to be as much of a science as any other kind of cookery.

Fortunately, a good many scientific studies of sugar-cookery have been made in recent years. And the findings of these studies can be of great help to any Christmas candy-maker. So in preparation for the day when the call of the candy-kettle comes to your household, suppose I report some of these findings from the Bureau of Home Economics.

Whether you are making creamy candy like fudge or fondant, or chewy candy like caramels, or hard candy like peanut brittle, cooking to the right temperature is most important. Either overcooking or undercooking can spell failure in any batch of candy. So the surest way to success is to use a candy thermometer and cook the mixture to exactly the right point. If you make candy often, such a thermometer is a paying investment. It will save its cost many times over in the failures and waste it prevents.

The foods people have some suggestions about the proper way to use a candy thermometer. They say to put it into the kettle so that the mercury-bulb is entirely covered by the sirup but so that the bulb does not touch the bottom or sides of the kettle. And when you read the thermometer, have the sirup boiling. Also be sure the scale is on a level with your eye when you read the thermometer.

The old way to test candy was to drop a bit of the boiling sirup in cold water and then try it with your finger to see whether it formed a soft ball or a hard ball. This was the best method before the day of thermometers but, of course, it was not very accurate. One difficulty was that the candy would react differently unless the water was uniformly cold. And to know the true "soft-ball" and "hard-ball" stage in this test required considerable experience and training.

Speaking of the utensils for candy-making reminds me that the kettle you use is also important for the success of your candy. The foods people suggest using a kettle large enough to allow plenty of room for the candy to boil up. Otherwise you may lose some of it on the stove. You also want a kettle that heats uniformly so that the mixture will cook evenly. Scorching is a problem with candy. A bent uneven pan can ruin a good batch of candy. Since both milk and chocolate scorch very easily, a mixture containing either of these ingredients is safest if cooked in a thick kettle.

Some of our favorite candies belong in the creamy class. The foods people speak of them as "crystalline" candies because this creamy texture is the result of very fine crystals that form in the mixture. To this class belong the various kinds of fudge and also fondant and pralines. All creamy candy goes through 2 stages in making. In the first stage, the sugar dissolves and the sirup cooks to the right temperature. In the second stage, the candy is "creamed" or stirred to form the tiny crystals.

The trick is to form these tiny crystals and avoid the large crystals which would make the candy grainy. Since ordinary sugar -- that is, cane or beet sugar -- tends to form large crystals, most creamy-candy mixtures contain other ingredients to help cut down the size of the crystal. Brown sugar, corn sirup, or honey will help make the candy smooth. So will such substances as butter, cream, milk, or chocolate. And so will acids like cream of tartar, lemon juice or vinegar. A good recipe for any creamy candy calls for just enough of these helpers but not too much -- not so much that the mixture will form no crystals at all.

In cooking you have several ways of preventing the formation of large crystals. One is not to stir the mixture except at the very start of cooking. In other words, stir only enough to dissolve the sugar. Then wipe off with a damp cloth any crystals that form on the sides of the pan during cooking. And don't scrape out the pan as you pour the candy off. Pour the hot candy on a large, cold, smooth surface to cool quickly. And wait patiently until the candy cools before you start stirring or creaming. Then stir until the entire mass is creamy to prevent a grainy texture.

The chewy and hard candies like caramels, butter scotch and taffies are firm but contain no crystals. They contain larger quantities of corn sirup or molasses or enough acid to prevent crystals.

Here's one point to remember about caramels. They contain a good deal of milk to give them a rich caramel flavor. But add that milk in small quantities or it will curdle and spoil the texture of the candy. Many candymakers like to use evaporated milk for caramels to avoid this trouble with curdling.

That concludes my collection of tips for Christmas candy makers.

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